

WAR'S END:

THE ITALIAN IMMIGRANT
SPEAKS OF THE FUTURE

BY

JOHN FOSTER CARR



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THE flag called to our foreign born, and eloquently the casualty lists showed how heroically they responded in our day of need. Yet insistently the shameful question rises: Are they elements of strength or of division for the building of the greater nation? Are they heart aliens or blood brothers? They need no apologists. Let them answer for themselves! What, especially, have our Italians here at home been saying of the war, when their brothers were valiantly fighting in our army, and their kinsmen in their motherland were battling with the hordes of the north—when, again, in the days of world peril, the hated *Tedeschi* poured down through the mountains and ravaged the sacred soil of the *patria*?

Immigrants in tenements are close brothers to Kipling's single men in barracks—far from plaster saints. And these Italian friends of mine have not been without the bitter hatreds of war, which they hurled at the odd pacifist. But while I have listened to their earnest and picturesque words, as they talked of the horrors of Europe, they seemed to echo clearly a great hope for the world of the

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future. Are not their thoughts and beliefs those of our other immigrants—Polcs, Greeks, Jews; perhaps indeed, for human feeling, in large part the thoughts and beliefs of working people everywhere?

Many an Italian immigrant, with the sentiment of a longing backward glance, will see in Lincoln only, as one of them says, "*il Garibaldi americano*," and yet know the duty of giving his first loyalty to this land where he earns his bread, and has first found what he strangely calls "ease" in life. Wonderfully is loyalty born in gratitude, and the man is caught and held by something of the genius and life of our country, and he longs for a heart-whole and unquestioned welcome to the brotherhood of the nation. If America, reaching into the slums, can magically give so much of herself to these humble workers, in them she can also surely find precious gifts for her own defense and upbuilding—noble qualities of heart and mind, character, the fibre of men.

And so I write down faithfully, translating sentence by sentence, and as far as I can, *word for word*, some of the things I have heard on many nights during this war from the most articulate spirits of a single gathering place. Idealists? Patriot Dreamers, before ever there were shouts of victory in the air? Yes, but men practical enough, as they say, not "to mistake the doctor's error

for the will of God!" "It is the things that the Lord does that are well done," declares my pious boot-black friend.

It was a workingman's restaurant on Sullivan Street, reserved for the Genoese. Sicilians almost alone break its provincial exclusiveness. "Why?" I asked Gusto. "*Signore*," he replied, "they also are men of the sea. And they trust us."

A model of a square rigged three-master, *La Stella Polare*, Old Glory flying honorably from her mizzen truck, hangs in a deep frame behind the grimy street window. On the walls are glazed and flaming lithographs of two of the latest dreadnaughts of the Italian navy, and between them, our own *Connecticut*—famous photograph—plows smooth seas. For luck, there is a carved dog's head over the kitchen door. At six o'clock longshoremen, coal heavers, laborers and workmen of the "lower trades" fill the tables that crowd the sanded floor.

You will meet at Gusto's democratic board men who can read but little, and that little only with the aid of an index finger, carefully stopping beneath each word. But their talk is none the less filled with the shrewd wisdom of workers, who are at daily grips with life. Again, you may chance to sit with a man who, though uneducated, has read many books and good books—a reader who is the surprise and the delight of our librarians. At Gusto's for a certainty, you will meet travelled

men, who know all the seven seas; for whom, as the Genoese proverb has it, "the winds blow and the whole wide world is their home." Nearly all have served in the Italian army or navy, and so have some practical knowledge of the planning and practice of war. There, one night, a roofer, long a sailor and once a mason, made me on the white oil-cloth table-cover a neat sketch of the harbor of Vera Cruz that might well have been the work of an engineer. There, too, when the fleets of the Allies first assailed the approaches of Constantinople, we were given a vivid and as it afterward proved, true word picture of the military possibilities of those tortuous and frightful miles of the Dardanelles. And one other night we had a careful drawing of the defenses of Smyrna, that made ridiculous the newspaper prophecy of its early capture.

A June night in 1915, the single gas jet in Gusto's back room flared through layers and streamers of smoke from Brooklyn-made Toseani cigars. Five of us were eating at the long table. With his great apron the *bosso* laboriously crumbed a place for me among them. They had been talking about the war and Gusto said: "That big Luigi was just here. He told us that his little boy had asked him: 'Papa, why are men killing each other in that great war in Europe?' And Luigi said he answered his boy: 'My son, men are asking each other that same que-

tion, and no one knows why the Germans started their butchery. As for myself, I think it is because of the kings.' ”

Whereupon I asked my friend the Stoker: “Why has Italy entered the war?” He replied: “I can tell you. It is simple. In the first place, in northern Italy and in Rome, where men remember best the terrible oppression of our fathers, there is a hatred, a secular hatred, *Signore*, of Austria—a hatred that from generation to generation has grown in our blood, until it has become a passion to destroy the root of the evil we have suffered—a hatred fed these last years by Austrian persecution of our brothers of Italian speech in the unredeemed provinces. In those valleys, as our proverb says, the cat has been shut up so long that it has become a lion.’ Justice is more necessary than peace, and it is a war for Italian freedom.”

“And there is a more important reason. Italians are very sympathetic to all suffering—their patriotism is humanitarian. Our mothers are always talking to their children of love, tenderness, goodness. Our boys are taught nothing of bayonets and world power. They are not inspired with dreams of becoming great soldiers and generals. Our king is a master of the art of war. He has studied it all his life. But the people know nothing of this. They know of his work to make service in army and navy less hard for our young

men, and his sympathy for the unfortunate, and the many reforms he has insisted upon in the prisons. When he goes to war, does he go as a *generalissimo*? No! He goes with the commission and in the uniform of a corporal, and he is seen in a soldier's tent, *personalmente, Signore*, making coffee!"

"But in Germany it is not so. I know! I have worked beside Germans on ships, shovelling coal into the furnaces. I have made all the long journey on foot from Hamburg to Genoa. They are good people, but they are taught brutality. And as my father used to say: 'A man who eats hay becomes a beast.' So, this is a war to end forever among men '*prepotenza*'—the arrogant brute force of the autocracy of Austria and Germany and Russia! This is the feeling, and even more than by the passion to redeem Trent and Trieste, Italy was moved to war by indignation over the atrocities of Belgium and the Lusitania."

"This, *Signore*, is why Italy is fighting Austria. It is why we have had the 're years' foretold by the witch of Carigliano."

And the Brown Stone Worker spoke. "The Lusitania justifies it all! Long lay awake that night after the news came trying to think what kind of man it was who pulled the lever that shot a torpedo at the Lusitania. I thought and thought I thought of the pictures I had seen in the newspapers of German soldiers and o

ficers, but I could not remember any face that looked so wicked and heartless. And I tried to believe there could be in the world only one man tiger enough to do so terrible a thing. Afterwards I felt sure that the papers were printing lies, when they said the people of Germany rejoiced at it, and cared nothing for those innocent children and women who went down to death in the cold water. But then they said the Kaiser had given a cross of gold to the man that did the act. So it must all be true, for the Kaiser gave another cross of gold to a man who wrote a song of hate. A nation with such an assassin's hatred is a nation gone mad."

Ciave, winner of insults, the one pacifist of Gusto's, whose father had worn the red shirt of Garibaldi, answered in his set voice: "Civilization should not permit war. No land is so precious that it should be bought with blood shed in crime—the awful crime of killing a stranger, who has never hurt you! When a baby is born, how happy are the young mother and father! How prompt they are to have him baptized, what care they take of him! Here in New York, even the poor child has doctors and nurses always guarding against his being sick. They examine the milk he drinks. But, when he is grown and war comes, this precious child, this product of love and care, and thousands and thousands like him, all loved, all precious as he is, are

sent marching over the roads by dozens and dozens of regiments. They are sent to take a few hills, a battle is fought, and a hundred thousand Christians are slaughtered in a few hours. We do not permit those animals from the sties to be butchered in so barbarous a way!"

And the Stoker said: "There is a better way! We are fighting for it now—the peace of democracy! England thinks that her strength is in her wonderful fleet. No, not that! England's strength lies in the free laws of England, the free laws that have built up the greatness of Canada and Australia, that, with a cruiser or two, keep the peace among hundreds of millions in India and Egypt. Free laws under democracy will give peace to all the world."

The Candy Maker turned to me and asked: "Shall we ever have militarism in the United States?" The Stoker interrupted: "No, I don't think so. Americans are not so foolish. They will not become militarists. They are too friendly and their friendly schools and libraries are against it. But to fight a war like this is different. It is to be willing to suffer and to die for humanity. It is the last war. It *must* be the last war. Every one is resolved on that. We must pay this last price. It is to save the world. Lincoln gave that great ideal. He is, for us Italians, like a light shining on a mountain top. Today the American n

tion needs us, and we are ready. Remember, it was an Italian bugler who sounded the reveille in Manilla Bay!"

A "*viva*" greeted him, and the Brown Stone Worker said: "But this time the battle for liberty will be fought in Italy; and it will be fought in France—the land of our Latin brothers! *Vive la France, victorieuse et immortelle!*"

That is what you heard always. Sentiment ennobled by the privations and toil that follow the great adventure of coming to the new world,—often a passionate hatred for the oppressor, always tender sympathy for the oppressed, an earnest will to do a man's part to the uttermost in establishing justice, a ready understanding of the big and simple things that America means.

* * * *

Again and again, as I have heard them talk, I have thought of the dream of John Ball: "For in these days are ye building a house which shall not be overthrown, and the world shall not be too great or too little to hold it: for indeed it shall be the world itself, set free from evil-doers for friends to dwell in." Those who make the sacrifice shall never see it? What matter? And they will quote you some verses of Adá Negri, the devoted poet of humble workers: "It is sublime to fall with eyes fixed upon the distant splendor of the Ideal."

It was another night, last year. There

was a clatter of talk and dishes, with a frequent thud of the ice-box cover, as Gusto dived for supplies for the tired, hungry and impatient in the large outer room, his customers—*costumi* is the adopted word of Italian New York. A door slammed loudly, a quick and heavy step, and we had with us Giovannibattista,—John Baptist, if you please—dear to his friends as Bacicecia. A sailor in service, he visits us whenever his ship is in port—a short, stocky fellow, bright-eyed and bullet-headed, with heavy upturned mustachios. On shore leave he always wears for clothes his festal best, fresh from his sea chest, and wrinkled from the damp packing of the voyage.

The shadow of the war was visibly upon Bacicecia. He was, as the Italians say "*preoccupato*." He had been "militarized" and knew that when he landed in Italy the next time he might be sent to the firing line to help Diaz. Not pleasant "No, by Bacchus! But it is my duty, and only a coward could refuse!" Life at best those solemn days was hard business for all of us, and the only philosophy Bacicecia could summon for the occasion was the wisdom of his countryfolk: "We are born crying, and no man laughs when he dies."

It was Bacicecia, years ago, who brought me the friendship of the Baker. I well remember his words: "There is coming tonight a wonderful man. I have never

met one whose speech gave me such satisfaction. I had not known him a week before I gave him the key to my house. We have made the round of the world together. He is a holy man, but I do not know what saint's name to give him. Perhaps the name of his own saint is best, for Saint Louis wanted to put love among men."

And this night, too, the Baker came with his long stride, his close-cropped head, his fixed grey eyes that now see little, and seem to look beyond to the helpless and suffering millions of whom he is ever thinking. Milan is his native city. As a child he had two years of school, which gave him a start at reading. He was thrown on the world when he was thirteen. Apprentice to a baker, he always worked far into the night, until for weariness he could stand no more. Then he would throw himself down at a table, his head upon his crossed arms, and sleep until the ovens were opened, and the smell of the hot bread woke him to the work of another day. He became a journeyman and a journeyman he has ever remained. Though an organizer of workmen's societies, an urger of reforms, he is rarely seen at public meetings, and prefers to gather a group about him when his spirit moves. And this is the gospel that he eloquently preached us, with the war for his fervid text:

“We shall have greater wonders than victories and defeats. England loses a fleet. Berlin is destroyed. Rome is sacked. Terrible things! But the final result will be greater than any military events, greater than the victory that is surely coming to us. There is to be a reorganization of society. Love and justice are coming upon earth, but the men I meet foresee nothing of it. They do not understand. They do not think. They are as ignorant as a waiter, who stands before a chemist’s bench, looking at bottles and jars of wonderful chemicals, looking at the scales and scientific instruments. What does he really know of what he sees? How can we teach people to think?”

“The Germans have taught the world how one of the virtues, obedience, can become a great vice. Ceaselessly they have drilled it into their people: ‘Obey! Obey! Obey! Surrender your own individual will! Do as you are told! Fight and die for the Kaiser!’ They were never taught the equality of free men. They were never taught love for other human beings. They were never taught that on the other side of the Rhine there are brothers and sisters; that beyond the Alps in Italy, there are brothers and sisters; that on the great plains of Russia there are brothers and sisters. Yet the heart of man is formed for love, for help and service—for brotherhood.”

"There is strength in working together with a common will. 'My country,' said our Mazzini, 'it is a communion of free and equal men, who become brothers in harmony of work that leads toward a single end.' But even stronger than the blind obedience of the unending close ranks of the German army is the intelligent action of the free individual man. The individualism of the Latin is strong in war. He always wants to ask: 'Where do I go, and why do I go, and why must I do this?' An army made up of men like that cannot be conquered even when machinery scatters death. So Napoleon won his victories; so Foch and our Diaz will win."

"Up from the quiet depths of the patient hearts of the working people, who more than all others are bearing the horrible sacrifices of this war, a new thought is coming for the blessing of the world. Those who have suffered most from these things know the evil. When the war is over, they will demand their accounting. They will say: 'This must never happen again. Where is the liberty we have always talked of? Where is justice? Give it to us!' The German working people will be among them—perhaps more passionate in their demands than any of the others, because they have been so terribly misled. On that day there will be a blush upon the German's face, when he thinks of the desolation of Belgium, of the piti-

less murders of the Lusitania, of the senseless destruction of beautiful cathedrals. He will be the first to insist that these things shall never be again; that no child or descendant of his shall ever be guilty of such barbarities. The day will come when a single drop of blood upon a nation's flag will be infamy. Already, as the priests say, 'the dead are opening the eyes of the living.' "

"Even an animal knows enough to do good to itself. A dog licks his own sores; a cat cleans its own face; a bird knows how to make its nest comfortable; but it is for man, a reasoning being, to do good to others. The old civilization of brute force, that has nearly wrecked the world came from the Caesarism of Rome and the savagery of the northern tribes of Europe. In that civilization, in Germany, man is still only an instrument. In the better civilization that is coming, man ceases to be a blind instrument in the hands of others, and becomes independent thought."

"Education is humanity's first need. The human mind is like a metal, which idleness, the very air, tarnishes. Every day it must be polished and used. Above all, education is the workingman's first need. Unions, under their politician leaders, concern themselves only with wages, fair hours and conditions of work, benefits, insurance, holidays and meetings. But more than these things should they seek light and knowledge, and the educa

tion of the heart, which is the education that the world most needs now. Talking won't do it, nor the clever articles we read in the newspapers, nor the sermons we hear today in the churches. Men must be filled with a new apostolate of love."

"Yet education and love alone are not enough. I went yesterday to see a friend who is in a hospital that is in charge of nuns. These nuns themselves would tell you that they are far from being what Christ meant them to be. But I thought as I looked about me: 'What spotless cleanliness, what discipline, what industry!' If we could only get our workingmen to impose upon themselves such ceaseless discipline and devotion, then what wonders could be accomplished in the world! Twenty thousand workingmen who know the realities of life, sincerely convinced of the great truths of life that must be in the coming reforms, under eight leaders in twenty years would make this a new world!"

"Mostly the great reformers of the world come from the humble crowds of working people. For the workers of the world have learned from their struggles the things the world needs, and they have had the discipline of self-sacrifice. Their hearts remain sound, kindly and sincere. Sincerity is a kind of holiness. They are the meek and the humble, and meekness and humility are the teaching of Christ."

"From the poor, from the workers Christianity must have its rebirth. There are compensations in another world. I am sure of it! But that is not enough. Christ is the Good Comrade in this world. None is better. He gives his followers that mysterious thing, peace. But he also teaches them service—the gift to humanity of greater compensations here. And His immense love and goodness will no longer permit men to surround His cross with terrible fields of artillery. These evils will now quickly pass. They will last only a moment—'only,' as we bakers say, 'as long as the freshness of bread,' which is gone almost as soon as it is out of the oven."

* * * *

And one day the Neapolitan came to me. He was an old man, but still in the full strength of his body,—short, erect, broad shouldered and heavily muscled. His large square shaped head was covered with white and curly hair. He was slow of motion and of speech—even his eyes moved slowly. He was grave, and at first silent and had little English. I have been able to learn almost nothing of his life. Like all his people, he was a simple and unschooled peasant, and had come here years ago as a laborer. By himself he learned to read. He saved money and in time he made money; but he lost it, and rumor has it that he is now a laborer again, no one knows where.

This day he brought me a book, a book with a message he was eager to give the world—a book he had written with the help of a friend before these years of terror were dreamed of. It was in some part an allegory—mystical, often crude and grotesque. In awkward, but rapturous verse and prose, there was history, biography, prophecy, declamation, song and prayer, fantastically interwoven—all in the struggle to put his message into words, so that men would hear and heed.

This message, how could it be given to the world? On the stage perhaps? Perhaps by the opera? Perhaps even by the movies? What was the message? That was for me to read!

The book opened with something of his own story, an immigrant's story. He had come to America, the wonderful land that had been miraculously discovered by Columbus, a man of his own race. He expected to find here a beautiful sylvan life, a viceless Eden, where men were dedicated to every kind of nobility. He arrived in the dark, in a fog, to the sound of an alarming bell. He was overwhelmed with the immensity of the buildings, the immensity of the evils of city life suffered by our immigrants. Disheartened, disillusioned, he wandered widely over the country, always seeking different work, and always vainly seeking a solution for his new world riddle, that had brought him so terrible a disappointment.

Broken, his dreams wholly gone, after many years he returned to his native valley near Naples. Still remembering "the horrors" of the factories and of the streets of America, he climbed one night the great hills of the Appennines overlooking his childhood's home. White birds fluttered silently before him, wheeling and circling, as he made his way to the summit of Monte Castello. And there, seated in the moonlight, this peasant poet seemed to look out as from a window of the Universe, and to behold a vision that transformed the world.

America was there suddenly transfigured in his sight: In our Republic, God had indeed founded a new society of men in which the ideals of the ages were at last to become realities. Woman would be glorified and fraternity strongly enthroned. William Penn, Washington, Jefferson and Lincoln stood forth in a new light. McKinley, the man without hate and envy, loving his enemy, gave new and glorious form to the revelation.

In the courts of Heaven itself, in "Temple of Mothers," he saw unveiled the future of America—a future free from the sordid, serene in the love of all mankind. For in America, where the battle between good and evil is so tremendously staged, against the dark host the heavenly armies fight winning. Death—the vision revealed it,—is the central fact of life. As it is the terror of the

guilty, so it should be the hope of the
just. Let men but know it as a won-
derful angel of peace, love and good will—
gentle and familiar friend. Let them
keep that thought of it ever in their
hearts, and the bitterness of envy, hate
and greed, that bring all our wars, will
pass from earth. So, no longer will death
be known as the revolting destroyer, and
wars will cease.

War and its red slaughter have ruled
the world from the day that Moses killed
the Egyptian. Let us open our ears to the
sounding lamentations of the widows and
orphans who have suffered from war
throughout the ages! Let all men be
filled with the horrors of these awful
troubles of earth! Let pictures of them
be stamped in the minds, hearts, souls of
women before they become mothers. Then
free America shall the remedy be
found. Religion and the love of women
working together shall compass the mira-
cle. For love, the love of God, is the
life of the soul on earth and in heaven—
a thing eternal, measureless, but ever
ready to make so mean a thing as the
heart of man its dwelling place.

As in the Garden of Eden stood the
tree of life, mystically the Neapolitan saw
his country, now forever his own, as a
new tree of life: The Mississippi is the
trunk; its broad tributary rivers, the
branches; the states, its marvelous fruit.
And again, America, in his vision, is a

wondrous tower of peace that God has caused to be built for the triumph of liberty and of oppressed humanity—tower that indeed is the work of the martyred souls, who century after century have dreamed vainly of liberty, of those who have cried out to unanswering stars beneath the yoke of tyranny. It is so strongly built that the cannons of the whole world cannot shatter it; and never star shall be lost from its flag. America the vision proclaims, as with the blowing of bugles, is to carry the message and the charity of Christ to all mankind, leading the world always to new and nobler ideal to the life of the spirit, which is the life of the universe—"into the single faith of future days"—into the peace and splendour and glory into which, in the end, all humanity shall blessedly enter.

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